

BIG LOST RIVER WATERSHED SUBBASIN ASSESSMENT AND TMDL



Final



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Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	ix
List of Appendices	xii
Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Symbols	xiii
Executive Summary.....	xvi
Subbasin at a Glance	xvi
1. Subbasin Assessment – Watershed Characterization	1
1.1 Introduction	1
Background.....	1
Idaho’s Role	2
1.2 Physical and Biological Characteristics	3
Setting and Topography.....	3
Climate.....	5
Subbasin Characteristics.....	6
Subwatershed Characteristics	14
1.3 Cultural Characteristics.....	65
History	65
Land Use	67
Land Ownership, Cultural Features, and Population	67
Economics	69
2. Subbasin Assessment – Water Quality Concerns and Status.....	71
2.1 Water Quality Limited Segments Occurring in the Subbasin.....	71
2.2 Applicable Water Quality Standards.....	74
Beneficial Uses	74
2.3 Summary and Analysis of Existing Water Quality Data.....	78
Flow Characteristics.....	79
Water Column Data.....	87
Biological and Other Data	104
Status of Beneficial Uses	116
Conclusions	120

2.4 Data Gaps	122
3. Subbasin Assessment – Pollutant Source Inventory.....	123
3.1 Sources of Pollutants of Concern	123
Point Sources	124
Nonpoint Sources	125
Pollutant Transport	125
3.2 Data Gaps	125
Point Sources	125
Nonpoint Sources	126
4. Subbasin Assessment – Summary of Past and Present Pollution Control Efforts.....	127
5. Total Maximum Daily Loads	128
5.1 Instream Water Quality Targets	128
Design Conditions.....	129
Target Selection	130
Monitoring Points	131
5.2 Load Capacity	131
5.3 Estimates of Existing Pollutant Loads.....	132
5.4 Load Allocation	137
Wasteload Allocation	137
Load Allocation	137
Margin of Safety	137
Seasonal Variation	138
Background	138
Reserve	138
5.5 Implementation Strategies	141
Approach.....	142
Time Frame	142
Responsible Parties	142
Monitoring Strategy.....	142
5.6 Conclusions	143
References Cited.....	144

List of Tables

Table A. 303(d) listed waters in the Big Lost River Watershed	xvii
Table B. Streams and pollutants for which TMDLs were developed.....	xix
Table C. Summary of assessment outcomes for listed streams and TMDL streams in the Big Lost River subbasin.	xxi
Table D. Temperature TMDL load reductions for streams in the Big Lost River Watershed.	xxiv
Table E. Erosion load allocations for Big Lost River subbasin.....	xxv
Table 1. Annual climate summary for stations in, or near the Big Lost River watershed with range of daily extremes.....	6
Table 2. Flow Measurements in Twin Bridges Creek.	29
Table 3. Flow Measurements in Assessment Unit SK025.....	31
Table 4. Flow Measurements in Assessment Unit SK022.....	34
Table 5. Land ownership within the Big Lost River Watershed.....	68
Table 6. Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics for the Big Lost River Valley.	70
Table 7. §303(d) Segments in the Big Lost River Subbasin.....	72
Table 8. Big Lost River subbasin designated beneficial uses.....	75
Table 9. Big Lost River subbasin existing/presumed beneficial uses.	76
Table 10. East Fork Big Lost temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life water quality standards.	89

Table 11. East Fork Big Lost Temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning water quality standards.	89
Table 12. Corral Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	90
Table 13. Corral Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	90
Table 14. Temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life water criteria.	91
Table 15. Temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	91
Table 16. Wildhorse Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	92
Table 17. Wildhorse Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	92
Table 18. North Fork Big Lost River temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	93
Table 19. North Fork Big Lost River temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	93
Table 20. Summit Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	94
Table 21. Summit Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	94
Table 22. USGS Big Lost River at Howell Ranch Temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	95
Table 23. USGS Big Lost River at Howell Ranch temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	95

Table 24. Warm Springs Creek Temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.....	96
Table 25. Warm Springs Creek Temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the Salmonid Spawning criteria.	96
Table 26. Antelope Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	97
Table 27. Antelope Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	97
Table 28. Bear Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	98
Table 29. Bear Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	99
Table 30. Cherry Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the cold water aquatic life criteria.	99
Table 31. Cherry Creek temperature data and number of days where water temperatures exceeded the salmonid spawning criteria.	100
Table 32. USGS water column data pertaining to water quality from 1996. ..	100
Table 33. USGS water column data pertaining to water quality from 1999. ..	101
Table 34. Water column metals sample in the Big Lost River upgradient of Empire Mine tailings pile in flood plain.	101
Table 35. Water column metals sample in the Big Lost River downgradient of Empire Mine tailings pile in flood plain.	102
Table 36. USGS water column data pertaining to nutrients from 1996.	102
Table 37. USGS water column data pertaining to nutrients from 1999.	102
Table 38. Nutrient data from select tributaries above Mackay Reservoir in May 2003.	103

Table 39. Nutrient data collected at select Big Lost River sites in August 2003.	103
Table 40. Nutrient data from Warm Springs Creek and Whiskey Creek in June 2002.	103
Table 42. Science Action Team Streambank Erosion Inventory Summary....	105
Table 41. DEQ Streambank Erosion Inventory Summary	105
Table 43. DEQ McNeil Sediment sample locations and percentage depth fines.	107
Table 44. SAT McNeil Sediment sample locations and percentage depth fines.	107
Table 45. Forest Service McNeil fine sediment trend monitoring for Big Lost River	107
Table 47. Little Boone Creek BURP Data.	114
Table 49. North Fork Big Lost River BURP Data.....	115
Table 50. Summit Creek BURP Data.....	115
Table 51. Twin Bridges Creek BURP Data.....	115
Table 52. Antelope Creek BURP Data: 7/18 sample listed as Cherry Cr. actually Antelope Creek.	116
Table 53. Bear Creek BURP Data.	116
Table 54. Cherry Creek BURP Data.....	116
Table 55. NPDES permits in the Big Lost River Watershed.....	124
Table 56. Existing wasteloads from point sources in the Big Lost River Subbasin.	133
Table 57. Current temperature Loads from nonpoint sources in Big Lost River Subbasin.....	134

Table 58. Current sediment loads from nonpoint sources in Big Lost River Subbasin.	136
Table 59. Wasteload allocation from point sources in the Big Lost River Subbasin.	139
Table 60. Temperature load allocations for Big Lost River subbasin.....	140
Table 61. Erosion load allocations for Big Lost River subbasin.	141
Table B1. Metric - English unit conversions.	168
Table C1. Data sources for Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment.	175

List of Figures

Figure A. Big Lost River Subbasin	xvi
Figure 1. Precipitation summary for the Lost-Wood divide monitoring location	5
Figure 2. Reconstruction of ice margins and fluvial systems at the latest and smallest of the glacial advances of the Potholes glaciation, about 20,000 years ago in the Big Lost River subbasin (redrawn from Evenson and others, 1982).....	10
Figure 3. Reconstruction of ice margins, fluvial, and lacustrine systems at the maximum of Copper Basin glaciation, probably about 120,000 years ago (redrawn from Evenson and others, 1982).....	11
Figure 4. Big Lost River subbasin land cover.	12
Figure 5. Subbasin names and locations in the Big Lost River watershed.	15
Figure 6. Location of the East Fork subbasin within the Big Lost River watershed.	16
Figure 7. Upper East Fork assessment unit.....	17
Figure 8. Lower East Fork assessment unit.	18
Figure 9. Starhope Creek subbasin assessment units.	20
Figure 10. Upper East Fork tributary assessment units.	21
Figure 11. Little Boone Creek assessment unit.....	22
Figure 12. Boon and Fox Creek assessment units.	22
Figure 13. Wildhorse Creek assessment units.	23
Figure 14. Location of the North Fork Big Lost River subbasin in the Big Lost watershed.	25
Figure 15. North Fork Big Lost River assessment unit.....	26
Figure 16. Summit Creek assessment unit.	27
Figure 17. Kane Creek assessment unit.....	27
Figure 18. Location of the upper Big Lost River subbasins in the Big Lost watershed.	29
Figure 19. Twin Bridges Creek assessment units.	30
Figure 20. Big Lost River Summit Creek to Burnt Creek assessment units.	31
Figure 21. Upper Big Lost River, Burnt Creek to Thousand Springs assessment unit.	32
Figure 22. Parson's Creek Channel of the Big Lost River assessment unit.	33
Figure 23. Thousand Springs assessment unit.....	34
Figure 24. Sage Creek assessment unit.....	35
Figure 25. Arentson Gulch assessment unit.	36
Figure 26. Willow Creek assessment unit.	37
Figure 27. Rock Creek assessment unit.....	38
Figure 28. Lone Cedar Creek assessment unit.....	39
Figure 29. Big Lost River from Thousand Springs to Jones Creek assessment unit.	40
Figure 30. Jones Creek assessment unit.	40
Figure 31. Pete Creek assessment unit.....	41

Figure 32. Mackay Reservoir assessment unit.	41
Figure 33. Warm Springs assessment unit.	42
Figure 34. Navarre Creek assessment unit.	43
Figure 35. Location of the Antelope Creek subbasin in the Big Lost watershed.	44
Figure 36. Iron Bog Creek assessment units.	45
Figure 37. Upper Antelope Creek assessment unit.	46
Figure 38. Leadbelt Creek assessment unit.	47
Figure 39. Antelope Creek Iron Bog Creek to Dry Fork assessment unit.	47
Figure 40. Dry Fork Creek assessment unit.	48
Figure 41. Bear Creek assessment unit.	48
Figure 42. Cherry Creek assessment unit.	49
Figure 43. Antelope Creek Dry Fork Creek to Spring Creek AU.	49
Figure 44. Spring Creek assessment unit.	50
Figure 45. South Fork of Antelope Creek assessment unit.	51
Figure 46. Lower Antelope Creek assessment unit.	51
Figure 47. Lower Big Lost River assessment units in the Big Lost River watershed.	53
Figure 48. Mackay Dam, Mackay Reservoir, and the tailwater section of the Big Lost River.	54
Figure 49. Mackay Reservoir to Beck and Evan Ditch assessment unit.	55
Figure 50. Alder Creek assessment unit.	56
Figure 51. Alder Creek Valley looking west toward historic mines.	56
Figure 52. Big Lost River Beck and Evan Ditch to Alder Creek assessment unit.	57
Figure 53. Big Lost River Alder Creek to Antelope Creek assessment unit.	58
Figure 54. Lower Pass Creek assessment unit.	59
Figure 55. Pass Creek assessment unit.	60
Figure 56. Elbow to Jaggles Creek assessment unit.	61
Figure 57. Moore Diversion showing irrigation ditches on the left and right and the dewatered natural channel and “Spring Creek” in the middle.	62
Figure 58. King, Lime, Ramshorn and Anderson Canyon assessment units.	62
Figure 59. Big Lost River Antelope Creek to Spring Creek assessment unit.	63
Figure 60. Spring Creek channel of the Big Lost River assessment unit.	63
Figure 61. Spring Creek Channel to Sinks assessment unit.	64
Figure 62. Sinks and Playas assessment unit.	64
Figure 63. Land ownership in the Big Lost River watershed.	68
Figure 64. Big Lost River Watershed §303(d) listed Waters.	73
Figure 65. Peak flow recurrence interval for the Big Lost River at the Howell Ranch.	80
Figure 66 Peak flow recurrence interval for the Big Lost River above Mackay Reservoir.	81
Figure 67. Peak flow recurrence interval for the Big Lost River below Mackay Reservoir.	82
Figure 68 Peak flow of the Big Lost River measured at the Howell Ranch USGS gage (USGS, http://water.usgs.gov/nsip/)	83

Figure 69. Mean monthly flow of the Big Lost River measured at the Howell Ranch gage.....	83
Figure 70. Peak flow of the Big Lost River measured above Mackay Reservoir (USGS, http://water.usgs.gov/nsip/).	84
Figure 71. Mean monthly flow of the Big Lost River measured above Mackay Reservoir.	85
Figure 72. Peak flow of the Big Lost River measured below Mackay Reservoir(USGS, http://water.usgs.gov/nsip/).....	85
Figure 73. Mean monthly flow of the Big Lost River measured below Mackay Reservoir.	86
Figure 74. Peak Flow of west channel gage on Warm Springs Creek (USGS, http://water.usgs.gov/nsip/).....	86
Figure 75. Peak Flow of east channel gage on Warm Springs Creek (USGS, http://water.usgs.gov/nsip/)	87
Figure 76. Combined channel mean monthly flow in Warm Springs Creek.....	87
Figure 77. Upper East Fork Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected near the source just below The Swamps.	108
Figure 78. Upper East Fork Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected above the Burma Rd. Bridge.	108
Figure 79. Middle East Fork Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected below Star Hope Creek.	109
Figure 80. Lower East Fork Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected above Wild Horse Creek.	109
Figure 81. Upper North Fork Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected at Squib Canyon.....	110
Figure 82. Middle North Fork Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected below Burnt Creek.....	110
Figure 83. Lower North Fork Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected just above Deep Creek.....	111
Figure 84. Big Lost River length frequency distribution for fish collected at Bartlett Point.....	111
Figure 85. Antelope Creek length frequency distribution for fish collected above Horsetheif Cr.	112
Figure 86. Bear Creek length Frequency distribution for fish collected 2 mi. above Antelope Rd.....	112
Figure 87. Bear Creek length frequency distribution for fish collected 1 mi. above Antelope Rd.....	113
Glossary.....	148

List of Appendices

Appendix A. Unit Conversion Chart.....	167
Appendix B. State and Site-Specific Standards and Criteria.....	169
Appendix C. Data Sources.....	174
Appendix D. Distribution List	176
Appendix E. Public Comments.....	178
<u>Appendix F. BURP and Fish Data</u>	190
Appendix G. Erosion Inventory Methodology.....	220

Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Symbols

§303(d)	Refers to section 303 subsection (d) of the Clean Water Act, or a list of impaired waterbodies required by this section	cm	centimeters
μ	micro, one-one thousandth	CWA	Clean Water Act
§	Section (usually a section of federal or state rules or statutes)	CWAL	cold water aquatic life
ADB	assessment database	CWE	cumulative watershed effects
AWS	agricultural water supply	DEQ	Department of Environmental Quality
BAG	Basin Advisory Group	d	day
BLM	United States Bureau of Land Management	DO	dissolved oxygen
BMP	best management practice	DOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
BOD	biochemical oxygen demand	DWS	domestic water supply
BOR	United States Bureau of Reclamation	EMAP	Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program
Btu	British thermal unit	EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
BURP	Beneficial Use Reconnaissance Program	ESA	Endangered Species Act
C	Celsius	F	Fahrenheit
cfu	colony forming units	FPA	Idaho Forest Practices Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations (refers to citations in the federal administrative rules)	FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
cfs	cubic feet per second	GIS	Geographical Information Systems
		HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code
		I.C.	Idaho Code
		IDAPA	Refers to citations of Idaho administrative rules

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

IDFG	Idaho Department of Fish and Game	MWMT	maximum weekly maximum temperature
IDL	Idaho Department of Lands	n.a.	not applicable
IDWR	Idaho Department of Water Resources	NA	not assessed
INFISH	The federal Inland Native Fish Strategy	NB	natural background
IRIS	Integrated Risk Information System	nd	no data (data not available)
km	kilometer	NFS	not fully supporting
km²	square kilometer	NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
LA	load allocation	NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
LC	load capacity	NTU	nephelometric turbidity unit
m	meter	ORV	off-road vehicle
m³	cubic meter	ORW	Outstanding Resource Water
mi	mile	PACFISH	The federal Pacific Anadromous Fish Strategy
mi²	square miles	PCR	primary contact recreation
MBI	macroinvertebrate index	PFC	proper functioning condition
MGD	million gallons per day	ppm	part(s) per million
mg/L	milligrams per liter	QA	quality assurance
mm	millimeter	QC	quality control
mo	month	RBP	rapid bioassessment protocol
MOS	margin of safety	RDI	DEQ's river diatom index
MRCL	multiresolution land cover	RFI	DEQ's river fish index
		RHCA	riparian habitat conservation area

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

RMI	DEQ's river macroinvertebrate index	t/y	tons per year
RPI	DEQ's river physiochemical index	U.S.	United States
SBA	subbasin assessment	U.S.C.	United States Code
SCR	secondary contact recreation	USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
SFI	DEQ's stream fish index	USDI	United States Department of the Interior
SHI	DEQ's stream habitat index	USFS	United States Forest Service
SMI	DEQ's stream macroinvertebrate index	USGS	United States Geological Survey
SRP	soluble reactive phosphorus	WAG	Watershed Advisory Group
SS	salmonid spawning suspended sediment	WBAG	<i>Waterbody Assessment Guidance</i>
SSOC	stream segment of concern	WBID	waterbody identification number
STATSGO	State Soil Geographic Database	WET	whole effluence toxicity
TDG	total dissolved gas	WLA	wasteload allocation
TDS	total dissolved solids	WQLS	water quality limited segment
T&E	threatened and/or endangered species	WQMP	water quality management plan
TIN	total inorganic nitrogen	WQRP	water quality restoration plan
TKN	total Kjeldahl nitrogen	WQS	water quality standard
TMDL	total maximum daily load		
TP	total phosphorus		
TS	total solids		
TSS	total suspended solids		

Executive Summary

The federal Clean Water Act (CWA) requires that states and tribes restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters. States and tribes, pursuant to Section 303 of the CWA are to adopt water quality standards necessary to protect fish, shellfish, and wildlife while providing for recreation in and on the waters whenever possible. Section 303(d) of the CWA establishes requirements for states and tribes to identify and prioritize waterbodies that are water quality limited (i.e., waterbodies that do not meet water quality standards). States and tribes must periodically publish a priority list of impaired waters, currently every two years. For waters identified on this list, states and tribes must develop a total maximum daily load (TMDL) for the pollutants, set at a level to achieve water quality standards. This document addresses the waterbodies in the Big Lost River Subbasin that have been placed on what is known as the "§303(d) list."

This subbasin assessment and TMDL analysis has been developed to comply with Idaho's TMDL schedule. This assessment describes the physical, biological, and cultural setting; water quality status; pollutant sources; and recent pollution control actions in the Big Lost River Subbasin located in south central Idaho (Figure A). The first part of this document, the subbasin assessment, is an important first step in leading to the TMDL. The starting point for this assessment was Idaho's current §303(d) list of water quality limited waterbodies. Nine segments of the Big Lost River Subbasin were listed on this list. The subbasin assessment portion of this document examines the current status of §303(d) listed waters (Table A), and defines the extent of impairment and causes of water quality limitation throughout the subbasin. The loading analysis quantifies pollutant sources and allocates responsibility for load reductions needed to return listed waters to a condition of meeting water quality standards.

Subbasin at a Glance

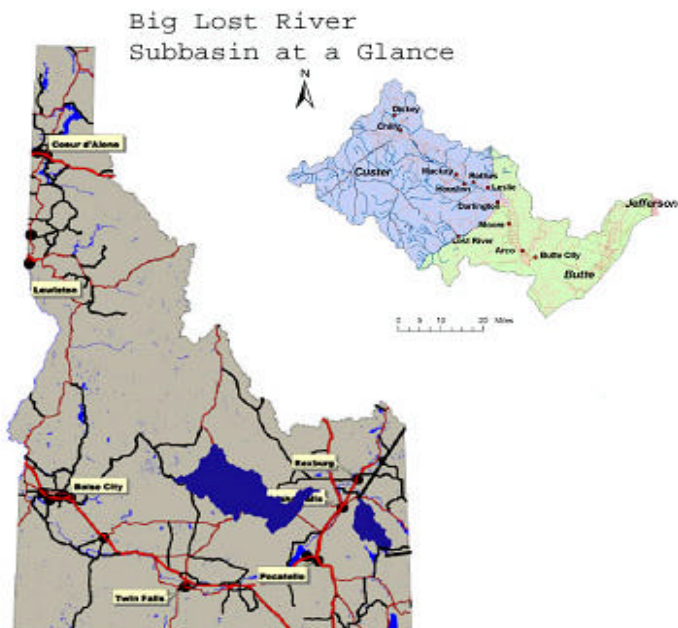


Figure A. Big Lost River Subbasin

Table A. 303(d) listed waters in the Big Lost River Watershed

Waterbody Name	Segment ID Number	1998 §303(d)¹ Boundaries	Pollutants	Listing Basis
Big Lost River	2161	Moore Diversion to Hwy 20	Low Oxygen, Flow Alteration, Excess Nutrients, Excess Sediment, Elevated Temperature	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
Big Lost River	2164	Chilly Buttes to Mackay Reservoir	Nutrients, Sediment	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
Spring Creek	2167	Springs to Big Lost River	Dissolved Oxygen, Flow Alteration, Nutrients, Sediment, Temperature	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
Antelope Creek	2168	Spring Creek to Big Lost River	Flow Alteration, Sediment, Temperature	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
Twin Bridges Creek	2176	Headwaters to Big Lost River	Nutrients, Sediment	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
East Fork Big Lost River	2179	Starhope Creek to Forks	Habitat Alteration	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
East Fork Big Lost River	2180	Headwaters to Starhope Creek	Sediment, Temperature	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
Little Boone Creek	5236	Headwaters to East Fork Big Lost River	Undetermined Pollutants	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores
Warm Springs Creek	5237	(Hamilton) Spring to Mackay Reservoir	Undetermined Pollutants	Low SMI, SFI, and SHI scores

¹Refers to a list created in 1998 of waterbodies in Idaho that did not fully support at least one beneficial use. This list is required under section 303 subsection “d” of the Clean Water Act.

The Big Lost River subbasin of south central Idaho is a watershed isolated from surface connection with the Snake River in Idaho. The Big Lost River watershed is one of four watersheds known in central Idaho as the Sinks Drainages. Surface flow that is not utilized for irrigation sinks, or infiltrates, to groundwater that is conducted in a southwest direction toward the Thousand Springs reach of the Snake River near Hagerman, Idaho where spring flow emerges.

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

Native fish populations, water quality, and riparian habitat conditions are issues of concern in the subbasin. The cumulative effects of irrigation diversion, alteration of vegetation by grazing in riparian areas, human-caused stream alterations, historic mining practices, roads, residential and municipal development, and past timber harvest have combined to impact water quality and aquatic life in the watershed.

The level of impact is important within the TMDL framework; has beneficial use support been reduced to the point that streams do not support beneficial uses including salmonid spawning or coldwater aquatic life or are these beneficial uses supported at levels that do not require restorative action through a TMDL. If numeric water quality standards are not met then the level of beneficial use support is not factored into determining whether or not a TMDL is required. The issue is not restoration of beneficial uses, but compliance with numeric water quality standards. Production and survival of aquatic species may be limited in some waters but not to the extent that a TMDL is required.

Rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, and brook trout have been documented in the watershed. There is uncertainty as to which, if any species are native to the watershed, however it is felt by some, and not by others that cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, and bull trout are native. Others feel that only mountain whitefish are native.

Designated Beneficial Uses are listed in Idaho Water Quality Standards for The Big Lost River and include cold water aquatic life, salmonid spawning, primary contact recreation, secondary contact recreation, domestic water supply, and special resource water. Undesignated uses within the Big Lost River Watershed are implied to be supported and are not specifically listed in the State water quality standards. Undesignated beneficial uses include cold water aquatic life and primary and secondary contact recreation for the remainder of the watershed with perennial flow above 1 cfs.

Limited biological assessments at discrete locations conducted by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) have shown that several streams in the subbasin are water quality limited. Elevated water temperature prevents some streams from meeting water quality standards, and is the primary nonpoint source pollutant of concern. A number of streams that are on the 303(d) list for sediment impairment show full support for salmonid spawning, and cold water aquatic life support status has not been adequately determined through the Beneficial Use Reconnaissance Program (BURP) sampling. Where these streams exceed water quality standards for temperature TMDLs for temperature and sediment have been prepared because the two pollutants are closely related.

Discharge of settleable solids above levels specified in NPDES permits is a specific concern along with temperature exceedence on Warm Springs Creek. Natural and anthropogenic (man-caused) flow alteration has also been identified as the primary source of perturbation in the main Big Lost River subbasin from Chilly Buttes to Mackay Reservoir, and from the Moore Diversion to US Highway 20/26 at Arco, Idaho.

Data has been collected and analyzed to evaluate the water quality limiting issues on the §303(d) list of water quality impaired streams and a number of nonlisted streams within the Big Lost

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

River watershed. Existing data submitted to DEQ in adequate time for evaluation was also used to assess water quality.

Three wasteload allocations were prepared for point source discharges within the Big Lost River subbasin. Two hatcheries on Warm Springs Creek received four waste load allocations that reduce discharge of settleable solids from their effluent and allocate effluent temperatures to not exceed water quality standards. The City of Mackay receives a waste load allocation that reflects the draft NPDES permit for discharge from the Waste Treatment Facility that is currently under review.

Twelve Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) have been developed to address issues of temperature exceedence of water quality standards on eleven streams (two segments on Antelope Creek). Sediment TMDLs have been prepared for the streams with temperature exceedence with the exception of Warm Springs Creek and the main Big Lost River from its origin at the confluence of the North and East Forks of the Big Lost River to Chilly Buttes. Warm Springs Creek is covered under the Waste Load Allocation and has a temperature TMDL. Sediment TMDLs were prepared for two additional streams that did not have sufficient temperature data to determine a TMDL for thermal loading; Twin Bridges Creek and Thousand Springs Creek. Table B provides a summary of the TMDLs developed for the Big Lost River subbasin.

Table B. Streams and pollutants for which TMDLs were developed.

Stream	TMDL Pollutant(s)
East Fork Big Lost River	Sediment, Temperature
Corral Creek (East Fork Big Lost tributary)	Sediment, Temperature
Starhope Creek	Sediment, Temperature
Wildhorse Creek	Sediment, Temperature
North Fork Big Lost River	Sediment, Temperature
Summit Creek	Sediment, Temperature
Big Lost River: Source to Chilly Buttes	Temperature
Twin Bridges Creek	Sediment
Thousand Springs Creek	Sediment
Warm Springs Creek	Temperature
Antelope Creek	Sediment, Temperature
Bear Creek	Sediment, Temperature
Cherry Creek	Sediment, Temperature

TMDLs for sediment are quantified through streambank erosion inventories. Sediment loading targets were developed based on the assumption that 80% streambank stability is an attainable natural condition described in frequency distributions developed in central Idaho by land management agencies. This is a conservative assumption and gives a margin of safety adequate to assure adequate sediment reduction and channel geometry that reduces thermal loading. Irrigation return flow to surface waters was not identified as a significant source of sediment because there is little flow that returns to surface waters. Hill slope erosion is assumed to be within the range of natural background in relation to affected streams. Sediment loading from

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

irrigated cropland does not occur in areas where sediment loads are identified as limiting beneficial use support or is not identified as a significant source of sediment in relation to the impact of flow alteration. In the language of Anti-Degradation legislation the allocation becomes the current load.

Targets for substrate sediment are adopted from land management agency targets derived from goals established in monitoring plans intended to guide management of public lands to improve salmonid egg and fry survival. Target values established in this assessment will be used to indicate trends related to channel morphology and streambank recovery. Beneficial use support status and compliance with state water quality standards will be used to determine the need for additional best management practices to improve water quality.

Temperature TMDLs have been developed for streams where temperature data has been collected and shows exceedence of temperature criteria in greater than 10% of observation days during spring or fall spawning periods. Thermograph data established that temperature TMDLs were necessary to meet the numeric salmonid spawning criteria [IDAPA 58.01.02.250(02)]. Temperature TMDL load reductions were developed by quantifying the maximum temperature exceedence for data collected during spring and fall spawning periods and subtracting that from the spawning temperature criteria to formulate the load reduction (allocation). The margin of safety factored into temperature TMDLs is implicit because the highest temperature recorded is the basis for the TMDL. Table B also summarizes the streams that have had temperature TMDLs developed.

Sediment TMDLs are intended to support a reduction in temperature loading and are based on 80% streambank stability. This proportion of streambank stability is assumed to be at average natural background conditions and would result in improved channel geometry and riparian vegetation to reduce sediment and thermal loading. Cold water aquatic life and salmonid spawning are expected to be fully supported at 80% streambank stability within the watershed. The margin of safety for sediment TMDLs is implicit.

Instream sediment targets have been identified from literature values that are supportive of salmonid spawning and cold water aquatic life. These target values are set at 28% fine sediment less than 6.35 mm (1/4 in.) in diameter in spawning habitat. Monitoring of instream sediment targets over the implementation period will be used to track the effectiveness of management practices and may be used to indicate the need for additional or more effective best management practices to improve water quality in the Big Lost River subbasin.

Reduced riparian vegetation contributes to accelerated streambank erosion, which results in increased sediment and thermal loading which, combined with associated changes in channel morphology due to sediment deposition, are the primary causes of temperature loading in affected streams.

Streams listed as having altered flow have been determined to be flow altered for significant periods of the year. Altered flow is not a pollutant as defined by the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 502(6). Since TMDLs are not required to be established for waterbodies impaired by effects other than pollutants, TMDLs will not be developed for flow-altered streams. They will

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

be listed in categories on the Integrated Report that reflect that they are primarily affected by flow alteration.

There are nine 303(d)-listed stream segments on 6 waters in the Big Lost River subbasin. Below is a tabular description of the issues related to the listed stream segments and the disposition of that stream segment according to categories described in the 2002 Water Body Assessment Guidance for Idaho (Table B).

A summary of temperature TMDL load reductions is shown in Table C. Elevated stream temperature is tied to streambank erosion related to reduction in density diversity and vigor of riparian vegetation. The load reduction is based on the highest observed temperature exceedence during the salmonid spawning period. The exceedence used could have occurred during the spring or fall spawning period. Only two accumulated days data during this period is required to establish a minor exceedence of water quality criteria.

Table C. Summary of assessment outcomes for listed streams and TMDL streams in the Big Lost River subbasin.

Waterbody Segment	Assessment Unit of HUC 17040218	Pollutant	TMDL(s) Completed	Recommended Changes to §303(d) List	Justification
Big Lost River (WQLS 2161) Moore Diversion to Hwy 20/26	SK002	Low Oxygen, Flow Alteration, Excess Nutrients, Excess Sediment, Elevated Temperature	No	List for Flow Alteration, remove from list for other pollutants	Flow Altered (Natural and Anthropogenic)
Big Lost River (WQLS 2164) Chilly Buttes to Mackay Reservoir	SK015	Excess Nutrients, Excess Sediment	No	List for Flow Alteration, remove from list for other pollutants	Flow Altered (Natural and Anthropogenic)
Spring Creek (WQLS 2167) Springs to Big Lost River	SK003	Dissolved Oxygen, Flow Alteration, Nutrients, Sediment, Temperature	No	List for Flow Alteration, remove from list for other pollutants	Flow Altered (Natural and Anthropogenic)
Antelope Creek (WQLS 2168) Spring Creek to Big Lost River	SK046	Flow Alteration, Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for Flow Alteration from Lower Diversion to Big Lost River, list for sediment and temperature from Forest Boundary to Lower Diversion	TMDL Developed

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

Twin Bridges Creek (WQLS 2168) Headwaters to Big Lost River	SK026_03	Nutrients, Sediment	Yes: Sediment	List for sediment remove from list for other pollutants	TMDL Developed
East Fork Big Lost (WQLS 2180) Headwaters to Cabin Creek	SK039	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed
East Fork Big Lost (WQLS 2179) Cabin Creek to Mouth	SK033	Habitat Alteration	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed
Little Boone Creek (WQLS 5236) Headwaters to East Fork Big Lost	SK033_02	Undetermined Pollutants	No	Listed in error. Remove from list: flow less than 1 cfs	Flow Altered (Natural and Anthropogenic)
Lead Belt Creek (WBID US58) Source to Antelope Creek	SK058	Temperature	No	Listed in error. Remove from list: flow less than 1 cfs	Flow Altered (Natural and Anthropogenic)
Warm Springs Creek (WQLS 5237) Hamilton Spring to Mackay Reservoir	SK043	Undetermined Pollutants	Yes: Temperature, NPDES Waste Load Allocation	List for temperature	TMDL Developed
Big Lost River (WBID US24) Forks to Chilly Buttes	SK024	Temperature	Yes: Temperature	List for temperature	TMDL Developed
Thousand Springs Creek (WBID US16) Chilly Slough to Big Lost River	SK016	Sediment	Yes: Sediment	List for sediment	TMDL Developed
Corral Creek (WBID US41) Coyote Creek to East Fork Big Lost River	SK041	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed
North Fork Big Lost River (WBID US27) Zipper Creek to Forks	SK027	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

Summit Creek (WBID US28) Phi Kappa Creek to Mouth	SK028	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed
Bear Creek (WBID US53) Right Fork to Mouth	SK053	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed
Cherry Creek (WBID US49) Forest Boundary to Mouth	SK049	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed
Starhope Creek (WBID US35) Muldoon Creek to East Fork Big Lost	SK035	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed
Wildhorse Creek (WBID US30) Fall Creek to Mouth	SK030	Sediment, Temperature	Yes: Sediment, Temperature	List for sediment and temperature	TMDL Developed

An exceedence of 10% of observation days is required to constitute a major exceedence. A summary of sediment load reductions in support of temperature TMDLs is shown in Table D. Load reductions are derived from the current load estimation taken from the expected sediment load that would occur at approximately 80% streambank stability. Where negative numbers appear, as in the case of Warm Springs Creek, over 80% streambank stability is estimated. Warm Springs Creek is covered under a wasteload allocation as a point source operating under an NPDES permit issued by EPA. Where erosion rates were calculated based on multiple samples the Existing Erosion Rate and Total Erosion Rate show Composite in Table D.

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

Table D. Temperature TMDL load reductions for streams in the Big Lost River Watershed.

Stream	Temperature Statistic	Highest Recorded Temperature (Current Load)	Criteria (Loading Capacity)	Load Reduction (Degrees C)	% Reduction
East Fork Big Lost River	Max Daily	21.3	13°C	-8.3	39.0
	Daily Ave	15.2	9°C	-6.2	40.8
Corral Creek	Max Daily	21.7	13°C	-8.7	40.1
	Daily Ave	14.39	9°C	-5.39	37.5
Starhope Creek	Max Daily	20.6	13°C	-7.6	36.9
	Daily Ave	13.6	9°C	-4.6	33.8
Wildhorse Creek	Max Daily	16.7	13°C	-3.7	22.2
	Daily Ave	11.33	9°C	-2.33	20.6
North Fork Big Lost River	Max Daily	19	13°C	-6	31.6
	Daily Ave	12.92	9°C	-3.92	30.3
Summit Creek	Max Daily	17.8	13°C	-4.8	27.0
	Daily Ave	11.6	9°C	-2.6	22.4
Big Lost River at Howell Ranch	Max Daily	14.6	13°C	-1.6	11.0
	Daily Ave	11.1	9°C	-2.1	18.9
Warm Springs Creek	Max Daily	20.9	13°C	-7.9	37.8
	Daily Ave	14.5	9°C	-5.5	37.9
Antelope Creek at Forest Boundary	Max Daily	19	13°C	-6	31.6
	Daily Ave	13.86	9°C	-4.86	35.1
Antelope Creek at Diversion	Max Daily	23.2	13°C	-10.2	44.0
	Daily Ave	15.1	9°C	-6.1	40.4
Cherry Creek	Max Daily	18.68	13°C	-5.68	30.4
	Daily Ave	16.47	9°C	-7.47	45.4
Bear Creek	Max Daily	19.4	13°C	-6.4	33.0
	Daily Ave	14.15	9°C	-5.15	36.4

Big Lost River Subbasin Assessment and TMDL

Table E. Erosion load allocations for Big Lost River subbasin.

Stream	Estimated Current Load		Load Capacity/Load Allocation		Reductions		
	Existing Erosion Rate (t/mi/yr.)	Total Erosion (t/yr.)	Erosion Rate (t/mi/yr.)	Total Erosion (t/yr.)	Total Erosion Reduction (t/yr.)	Total Erosion Rate Reduction (t/mi/yr.)	Total Erosion % Reduction to Meet Load Capacity
East Fork Big Lost River	Composite	1218	---	172	1046	Composite	85.9
Corral Creek	36	250	6.0	39	211	30	84.4
Starhope Creek	26	249	7.0	69.0	180	19	72.3
Wildhorse Creek	21	103	6.0	28.5	74.5	15	72.3
North Fork Big Lost River	Composite	285	---	54.3	230.7	Composite	80.9
Summit Creek	11	45	4	14.0	31	7	68.9
Twin Bridges Creek	115	536	7	33.1	502.9	108	93.8
Thousand Springs Creek	10	13	3	3.5	9.5	7	73.1
Warm Springs Creek	Composite	12.8	---	26.6	-13.8	Composite	-107.8
Antelope Creek	Composite	888	---	118	770	Composite	86.7
Bear Creek	11	52	4.0	17.0	35	7	67.3
Cherry Creek	Composite	156	---	53.2	102.8	Composite	65.9

